

## Rio+20:

### Proposals for the African Sustainable Development Agenda

Djiby Racine Thiam<sup>1</sup>

The objective of this policy brief is to identify potential African positions during the upcoming Rio+20 Sustainable Development Summit. While taking into consideration the specificities of the African countries and the nature of the continent's needs, the policy brief provides six proposals which could serve as insights to the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) during the negotiations. In developing these proposals, I follow two steps. Firstly, I review the commitments and agreements entered into by the continent during the last sustainable development summits, by summarising the various African positions as well as the development vision of the continent. Secondly, I assess the situation of sustainable development across the continent in considering the economic, social and environmental pillars. To reduce the poverty level and build new institutional frameworks that could guarantee the improvement of the living standard of the continent's populations, agreements should be focused on CO<sub>2</sub> reduction; management of natural resources; the reform of the world governance system; capacity building; meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the improvement of the energy sector.

#### Introduction

Twenty years after the Earth Summit held in Rio in 1992, governments and world leaders have expressed their desire to reach new agreements to promote sustainable development across the globe by organising a second Rio round summit in 2012. This year the Rio+20 Summit will bring together governments, experts, development partners, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and civil society to discuss the challenges surrounding

sustainable development issues. The themes selected this year are: a green economy in the context of sustainable development, poverty eradication, and the institutional framework for sustainable development. Additionally, the summit will also address seven critical issues: jobs, energy, cities, food, water, oceans and disasters. For the African delegates this summit represents a good opportunity for the continent to reach new agreements with industrialised countries through a modification of certain

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international commitments. Those commitments could take on economic, environmental and social characteristics, since those three pillars are the cornerstone of the sustainable development concept. Combining such pillars would allow African countries to reach international standards in terms of economic development by reducing poverty.

Moreover, to reduce poverty levels and inequality, as well as integrating African problems in the international global arena, new strategies should be formed. Such strategies should take both international and domestic forms. The international strategies should spur international initiatives to support development efforts of developing nations, while integrating their specificities in terms of political, economic and institutional frameworks. The domestic strategies, in turn, should commit African nations to updating their internal measures by modifying existing policies in order to improve the living standard of their populations.

This policy brief aims at identifying the potential African positions during the Rio+20 negotiations. It provides an overview of the existing international commitments reached during the different sustainable development summits and events. It also goes through the different African positions during the preceding negotiation summits, and identifies the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) as a new strategy binding the continent together in terms of a vision of development. This policy brief presents an overview of the progress made on sustainable development on the continent by integrating economic, social and environmental components through the Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Inequality Index (GII), the Gini Index (GI) and forest conservation.

**Review of the international commitments to manage sustainable development**

For decades, promoting sustainable development has been an objective of governments, international organisations and bilateral as well as multilateral development partners. The debate on the promotion of sustainable development could be said to have started in 1972 with the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, held between 5 and 16 June 1972 in the Swedish capital. The conference was the first United Nations (UN) meeting to raise the awareness of environmental degradation across

the globe and to provide to world leaders the information needed to take optimal decisions.

Three action plans came out of the Stockholm conference:<sup>1</sup> a) the global environmental assessment programme, Earthwatch; b) environmental management activities; and c) supportive measures. The global environmental assessment programme had three objectives. The first objective was to identify and create the knowledge needed to provide guidance during the decision process. Secondly, it aimed at providing an environmental assessment in order to forecast environmental variability; and finally, it aimed to create a platform where best experiences and practices could be exchanged among different stakeholders. The environmental management activities included studying the impact of human activities on the environment. Finally, the supportive measures targeted innovative measures to achieve the sustainable management of environmental resources. Those measures could, for example, take the form of education and training. As well as action plans, the Stockholm summit identified challenges in addressing the link between environmental protection and economic development through poverty reduction and the promotion of growth.

Moreover, the publication of the World Conservation Strategy (WCS) in 1980 contributed new strategies for promoting sustainable development across the globe. Such strategies provide both intellectual framework and practical guidance, allowing poverty reduction to be combined with environment conservation.<sup>2</sup> The main objective was to raise the awareness of different actors (governments, development partners, consumers, firms, producers and stakeholders) on the importance of conserving living resources. Living resource conservation has three specific objectives:<sup>3</sup> 1) maintaining essential ecological processes and life-support systems; 2) preserving genetic diversity; and 3) ensuring the sustainable utilisation of species and ecosystems.

However, it is important to emphasise that the sustainable development concept gained great attention in 1987 with the publication of the report *Our common future*<sup>4</sup> by Gro Harlem Brundtland, the Minister of State of the Kingdom of Norway between 1981 to 1996. She provided the most frequently used definition of the concept of sustainable development. The report defined sustainable development as 'the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. After its publication, *Our common future* was used as an input during the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, Brazil, and it

therefore prompted world leaders to start paying attention to the sustainable development agenda. It became clear that a different development path was required to tackle issues such as poverty, inequalities, and social exclusion.

The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in 1992 in Rio represents a critical moment in the sustainable development debate after the publication of the Brundtland report.<sup>5</sup> For the first time, objectives were set to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and clear incentive mechanisms introduced in the international arena to promote sustainable development. Such mechanisms were aimed at reducing environmental emissions of developed nations and alleviating poverty levels of developing nations.

The Rio conference came out with five proposals:<sup>6</sup> the Rio Declaration – a set of 27 principles on the environment and development agenda; Agenda 21 – a global plan of action addressing environmental and development concerns; the forest principles – a non-binding statement of 15 principles for the sustainable management of forests; the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). However, even though the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD) was created in December 1992 to guarantee follow-up to the Earth Summit results, the conclusions from the Rio conference failed to be implemented. For example, although poverty has been reduced in many African countries, the continent still lags behind the world in terms of poverty levels.

This motivated the organisation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa.<sup>7</sup> This summit in turn resulted in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), since the conclusions of the 1992 Rio conference had failed to be implemented. The summit in Johannesburg emphasised the requirement to build new institutional frameworks to promote sustainable development, since it was argued that such institutional frameworks would facilitate the achievement of the MDGs and Agenda 21. These new institutional frameworks should include the needs of all countries, taking into account the characteristics of developing nations and the means of implementation. They should also lead to the strengthening of international bodies and organisations dealing with sustainable development, while respecting their existing mandates, as well as the strengthening of relevant regional, national and local institutions.<sup>8</sup>

## The position of Africa during previous negotiations

The African position during the international negotiations has always been very controversial, since very often African countries have failed to speak with one voice during the sustainable development negotiations. This divergence in points of view is because African interests are sometimes heterogeneous. For example, countries with a high natural resource endowment have different interests from those with a weak natural resource potential. Moreover, the institutional, political and economic nomenclatures of African nations are also heterogeneous. In addition, the continent lacked a clear and defined programme that could bind African countries around common interests during the negotiations.

This second shortcoming has nevertheless been overcome since 2001 by the creation of the Nepad plan. Since the creation of Nepad, it is noticeable that Africa has agreed to set priorities in terms of development. Box 1 below shows the strategic actions incorporated in the Nepad plan.

However, although Nepad helped African countries to identify sustainable development priorities, a common African position started to emerge in 2009, when the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) clearly declared their commitment to defend African interests during the various negotiations. The position of the African negotiators was to challenge developed nations to reduce their emission levels, as such nations have a high responsibility in terms of climate change and environmental emissions.

Furthermore, African countries were also very sensitive about the principle of *common but different responsibilities*. They were aware that the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> should be the responsibility of the states, but at the same time it was necessary to integrate specificities of involved states by, for example, integrating the political, economic and institutional structures of African states, which are very often represented as 'weak states'. While African delegates have recognised the failure to implement the conclusions of the Agenda 21, they have also reminded developed nations of their historical responsibilities on climate change. They have therefore invited developed nations to increase their development aid to 1,5 per cent beyond the reference percentage of 0,7 per cent. Furthermore, beyond Agenda 21, African delegates have also given high importance to the Bali Action Plan (BAP), which gives priority to reducing poverty and inequality. The BAP also

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**Box 1** Nepad's thematic areas

- A: Agriculture and food security**
  - Food shortage
  - High food prices
  - Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)
- B: Climate change and natural resource management**
  - Environment
  - Energy and water
  - Biodiversity
  - Nepad's climate change and natural resource management programme
- C: Regional integration and infrastructure**
  - Trade
  - Regional co-operation
  - Infrastructure building
  - Partnership between private sector, infrastructure agencies and regional economic communities
  - Knowledge sharing and networking
- D: Human Development**
  - Health
  - Education and employment
  - Science and technology
  - Regional partnerships
- E: Economic and corporate governance**
  - Monetary policies
  - Public finance management
  - Corporate governance
  - Improvement of the environment for businesses
- F: Gender and capacity development**
  - Enhancing private-sector involvement
  - Empowering African women
  - Capacity building
  - Cross-sectoral initiatives to promote ICT development

Source: <http://www.nepad.org>

emphasises reducing emissions from deforestation in developing nations.

African delegates also agreed on the necessity to promote capacity building across the continent by promoting technology transfer from the north to the south and by facilitating knowledge exchange in identifying and sharing best practices. They also charged developed nations to increase their market-based incentive mechanisms, which aim to strengthen capacity building in the continent. Strengthening capacity building in the continent would require increased investments and access to technologies. This calls for the development of a new generation of physical and institutional infrastructure across the continent.

**African challenges for sustainable development**

Promoting sustainable development in the continent will require an integration of African challenges during the Rio+20 summit proposals. These challenges are: poverty reduction through

the attainment of the MDGs; mitigation of and adaptation to climate change; dealing with loss of biodiversity; lessening gender inequality and building capacity; and the restructuring of the African energy sector, since 1,4 million people across the continent have no access to energy facilities, which are important for development and a sustainable livelihood.

Therefore, the AGN should focus on these problems while negotiating an agreement with international communities, since the situation of the African sustainable development is very weak. For example, as regards the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental pillars), the continent is still lagging behind. Table 1 shows the status of the HDI in many African countries. Although the continent has made efforts during the last decade, it appears that African countries have the lowest HDIs. Compared with East Asia and Latin America, both Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are lagging behind in terms of the improvement of living standards. The Gender Inequality indices also show high gender inequality in Africa and

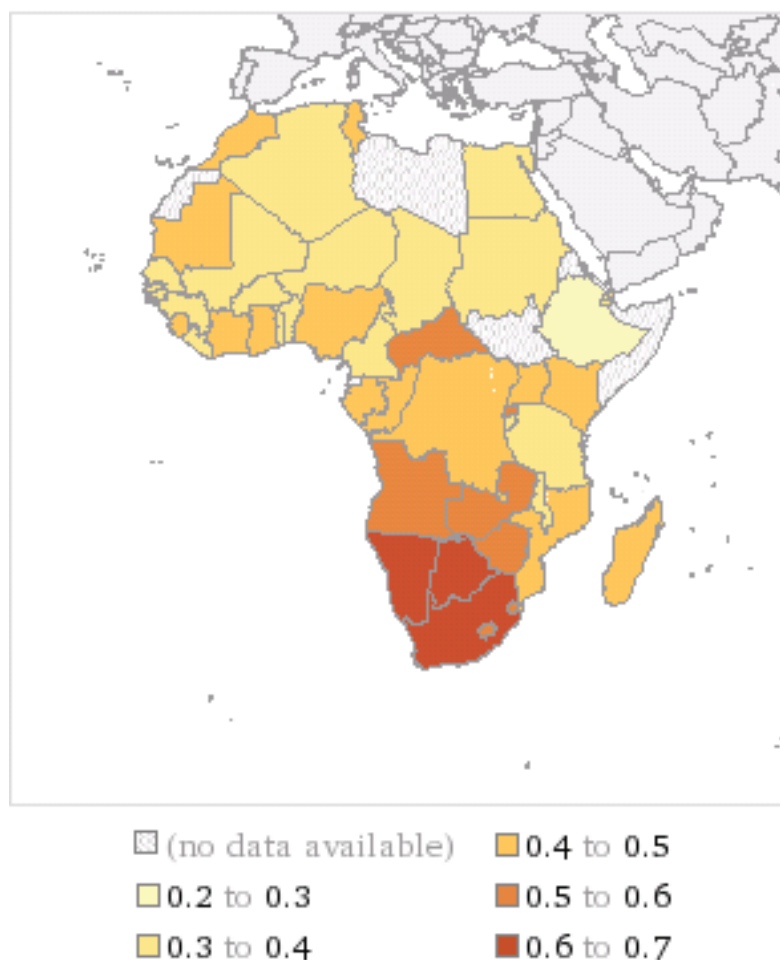
**Table 1** Data on HDI and GII indexes

Country	HDI 1990	HDI 2000	HDI 2010	GI I 2010
Algeria	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.6
Angola	-	-	0.4	-
Benin	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.8
Botswana	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.7
Burkina Faso	-	-	0.3	-
Burundi	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.6
Cameroon	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.8
Cape Verde	-	0.5	0.5	-
Central African Republic	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.8
Chad	-	0.3	0.3	-
Comoros	-	-	0.4	-
Congo	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.7
Congo, The Democratic Republic	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.8
Côte d'Ivoire	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.8
Djibouti	-	-	0.4	-
Egypt	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.7
Equatorial Guinea	-	0.5	0.5	-
Ethiopia	-	0.2	0.3	-
Gabon	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.7
Gambia	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.7
Ghana	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.7
Guinea	-	0.3	0.3	-
Guinea-Bissau	-	0.3	0.3	-
Kenya	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.7
Lesotho	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.7
Liberia	-	0.3	0.3	0.8
Libya	-	0.7	0.8	0.5
Madagascar	-	0.4	0.4	-
Malawi	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.8
Mali	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.8
Mauritania	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.7
Mauritius	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.5
Morocco	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7
Mozambique	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.7
Namibia	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6
Niger	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.8
Nigeria	-	0.4	0.4	-
Rwanda	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.6
Sao Tome and Principe	-	0.5	0.5	-
Senegal	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.7
Sierra Leone	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.8
South Africa	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6
Sudan	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.7
Swaziland	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.7
Tanzania, United Republic of	0.3	0.3	0.4	-
Togo	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.7
Tunisia	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.5
Uganda	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.7
Zambia	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.8
Zimbabwe	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.7
Africa	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.7
East Asia and Pacific	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.5
South Asia	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.7
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.6
OECD	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.3

Source: UNDP (2010)

As regards the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental pillars), the continent is still lagging behind

**Figure 1** African Gini index map



Source: <http://www.wolframalpha.com>

South Asia, followed by Latin America and East Asia.

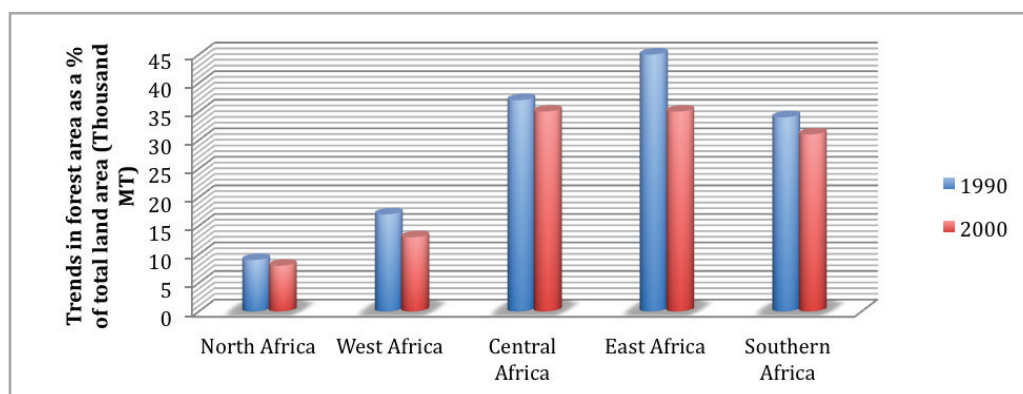
The inequality level is also very present in the continent, although it takes different forms across the continent. Figure 1 depicts the Gini index map of the continent. It appears that inequality is more noticeable in the southern area than in the rest of the continent. In terms of the environmental component, representing the third pillar of sustainable development, the continent has also experienced a loss of biodiversity through the degradation of forest areas (Figure 2). The deforestation rate still remains high across the continent. The deforestation in the continent is caused by population growth, the weakness of the forest management system and the exploitation of forest resources to fulfil heating needs through wood collection. Figure 2 shows the trends of reduction in forested areas as a percentage of land in the different parts in the continent.

### Proposals for the African positions for the RIO+20 Summit

We argue that the African position during the Rio+20 negotiations should be mobilised around six major points.

- The first and non-negotiable point should be to aggressively challenge developed nations to open a second Kyoto round (post 2012 phase), through which developed nations will agree to reduce their emissions. Targets should be to stabilise the climate within two degrees Celsius by 2050 and reduce the impact of climate change in the continent; a reduction rate of 50 per cent below 1990 levels should be targeted.
- The second point should be to make sure that the conclusions from the Rio+20 negotiations integrate African problems in such a manner as to adequately strengthen the African capacity to achieve sustainable development.

Figure 2 Trends in forest area as a percentage of total land area by sub-region



Source : (UN-ECA, 2011)

African problems are many, but the most urgent ones are the loss of biodiversity, deforestation and land degradation. The negotiations should therefore make sure that a deep assessment of the role and the achievements of the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD) is undertaken. The international community should also provide supplemental assistance to UN-REDD to support developing nations in their strategies to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. The role of the forest resources in African countries is crucial. According to Frances Seymour, the Director-General of the Center for International Forest Research, the conservation of forests has a large impact on a) food security, by providing hydrological and pollination benefits; b) poverty reduction, by providing diverse income sources; c) mitigation of climate change by storing carbon in vegetation and soils; and d) resilience in the face of climate change, by stabilising hillsides and coastlines and protecting them from damage from storm events and providing resistance to land fires. It is also important to emphasise that such international initiatives should be completed by internal measures raised within African nations.

- The third point should focus on capacity building in the continent. This could, for example, take the form of both technology transfer and the exchange of experiences and best practices. Capacity building could also be aided by revisiting the existing international market-based instruments, such as Clean Development Mechanisms (CDMs), which developed nations could use to reduce their emissions in

developing nations by promoting technology transfer. Beyond the additional condition, allowing CDM projects to take place, we argue that such incentives could incorporate Public-Private Partnership (PPP) schemes in order to adequately strengthen capacity building in the continent. Such a new framework would also incite African countries to improve their local conditions by providing innovative measures and new institutional frameworks in order to benefit from this partnership.

- The fourth point should focus on the world governance system itself, which impacts on African interests. The world governance system should be reformed and African interests should be the heart of the reforms.
- The fifth point should focus on linking the Rio+20 conclusions with the achievement of MDGs. In the international arena, this could be done through two measures: on the one hand, by respecting the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and Agenda 21. The AGN challenges developed nations to increase the international aid fund to 1,5 per cent of their GDP. On the other hand, linking sustainable development to the MDGs also requires considering the post-2015 phase, because many African countries will fail to achieve the objectives of the MDGs before 2015. This will therefore require developing nations to take joint action and improve their efforts to collaborate with industrialised countries at all levels to achieve the eight objectives included in the MDGs.
- The last point should be focused on linking the conclusions of Rio+20 to the situation of energy provision in Africa. In fact, 1,4 million people across the continent still lack access

**In fact, 1,4 million people across the continent still lack access to electricity services**

to electricity services. The agreements to be reached in Rio+20 concerning the energy sector in Africa should take two forms. On the one hand, new international mechanisms could be implemented to build up the energy market in the continent by facilitating the involvement of the private sector in such a market. This would allow the continent to be more autonomous in terms of investment mobilisation and capacity building. On the other hand, the international agreement in the energy sector should accelerate rural electrification, which is a great challenge in the continent.

### **Conclusion**

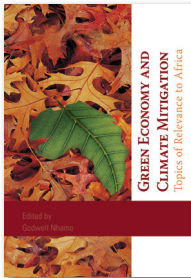
Rio+20 could be an interesting opportunity to incorporate African sustainable development issues in the international arena and also to allow Africa to reach new agreements to promote sustainable development throughout the continent. But to make the African voice representative and efficient, the continent needs to come up with common propositions. This should not be too complicated if work is done through the continent to identify and compile a list of African needs. Such needs should integrate the viewpoints of different stakeholders in order to give the African approach a bottom-up perspective, where voices of the people from the grassroots are integrated in the decision process. The usual top-down decision process that takes place between

technocrats does not really help the continent to empower young entrepreneurs, to promote gender equality, to promote involvement of civil society and to include the interests of farmers in rural villages.

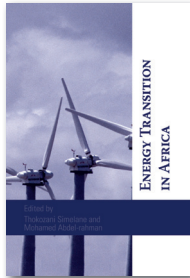
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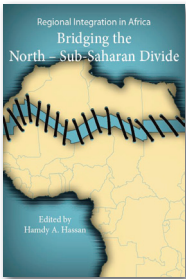




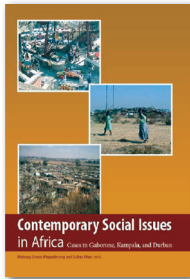
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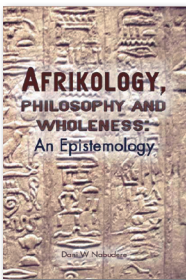
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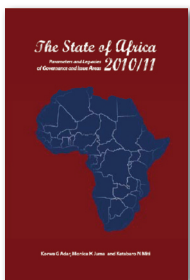
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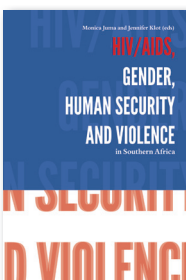
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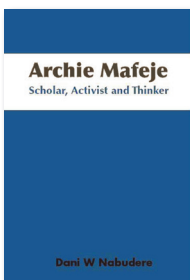
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